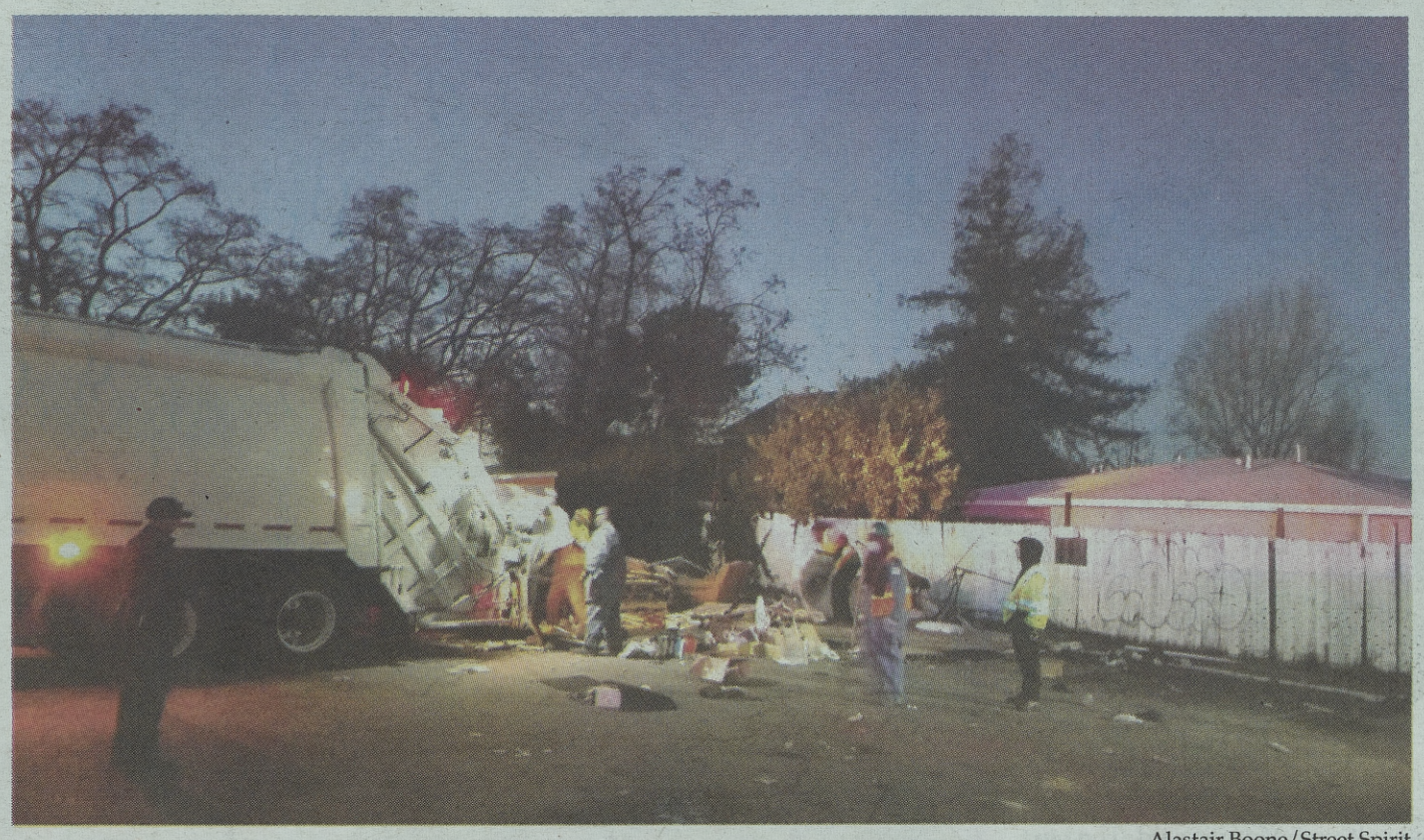
STREET SPIRIT

Justice News & Homeless Blues in the Bay Area

Volume 25, No. 1 | January 2019 | A publication of Youth Spirit Artworks | Donation: $2.00



Alastair Boone / Street Spirit

East Oakland encampment evicted

After months of negotiations, residents have moved back to the street—despite promises from city officials

By Alastair Boone

"WHAT do you have to say to my daughter?" Needa Bee screamed at the Oakland Department of Public Works employees who were tearing her home to the ground. "What do you have to say to my child? Where is she going to go?"

It was December 6, and Oakland Police officers had stormed Housing and Dignity Village—a homeless encampment for women of color and their children in East Oakland—to evict the residents who lived there. Just one day earlier, city officials had told residents that they would not force them to move until they could have a round table discussion with officials in the City Administrator's office. That meeting never occurred.

The following describes the months leading up to the destruction of Housing and Dignity Village: How the community formed, resisted eviction, sued the city, and ended up back on the street.

Housing and Dignity Village (HDV) was formed by homeless people and their allies on in late October, built on a plot of city-owned land that has been vacant since 2008. Over the course of a weekend, they took the land, gathered tents, pallets, and plywood from neighbors and supporters, and built a home. There was a community kitchen, shared living space, and a medic's tent stocked full of donated medical supplies. There were several tiny homes, either built by volunteers or donated by supporters. They lined up old tires and used them as planters—pouring in soil to grow a community garden.

"We are houseless, but this is our home"

It was a safe and sober living space for 13 individuals, most of them women and children. Residents often hosted community meals, in which they not only fed each other, but also residents of Brookfield—the low-income neighborhood where the encampment was located. According to Needa Bee—a program director at the Meiklejohn Civil Liberties Institute and a resident of HDV—said Housing and Dignity residents fed 500 people on Thanksgiving Day, both housed and unhoused.

"Me and my neighbors talk a lot, and none of us have a problem

Eviction continues on page 6

To read first-person accounts of the eviction from the residents of Housing and Dignity Village, turn to pages 7-8

2018: The year homeless people fought back

Amidst a slew of new homelessness policy, the unhoused organize to make an impact

By Darwin BondGraham

HOMELESSNESS has long been recognized as a staggering social crisis in the Bay Area, but 2018 was the year it became a full-blown political and legal crisis. In Oakland—the epicenter of the East Bay's shelter crisis—homelessness was the top issue debated during the mayoral and city council races, and the city's leaders increasingly recognize the need to prioritize services and shelter for the unhoused.

Surrounding smaller cities are also grappling with growing encampments and the obvious need to help the unsheltered. But while politicians argued over the best way to approach the sprawling tent camps and many housed residents complained daily on Nextdoor.com and to elected officials about homeless camps in their neighborhoods, unsheltered people increasingly pushed back against cities in 2018, especially against measures that they say punish and criminalize them for their pauper status.

In Oakland, Mayor Libby Schaaf rolled out her major initiative last January: Tuff Shed camps where case workers assist residents in seeking transitional housing. With three camps serving up to 120 people at a time, and more camps planned for new locations, the Tuff Sheds are one of the more ambitious programs run by any Bay Area city to help homeless people. So far, dozens of homeless people have transitioned out of the Tuff Sheds into more permanent housing.

The city of Oakland also took a major step this year by using Measure KK bond funds to purchase an old hotel on West Grand Avenue for $7 million. Renovated, the hotel will house up to 140 people at a time who will get one hot meal each day and have access to social workers

Year continues on page 4

Oakland gallery shows homeless artists

By Kate Wolffe

As a child, Oakland homelessness advocate April Anthony dreaded visiting art museums with her parents.

"I was bored to death anytime we went to museums or art shows," she said. "I thought: 'Man, this stuff should move!'" As an adult, she started experimenting with making art of her own, pieces that were more dynamic than the art she'd hated. She made her first mobile, out of copper wire and chandelier crystals, in 1992.

A few years after she started creating, Anthony became houseless, and remained so for 18 years. Although she currently lives in an apartment, she spent six years in the Albany landfill, and was part of a group that filed a federal lawsuit against the city after the Albany City Council voted to clear the site in 2013.

During her six years living at the landfill, she continued creating art. Other residents of the community began bringing her wire and colorful beads to incorporate into her mobiles. She became close with the other residents and aware that there were other artists in her midst, creating paintings, sculptures, and wood-burned designs.

In an art exhibition curated by Anthony that opened earlier this month at the 'Mary Weather' boutique on 15th Street in Oakland, that artistic community has left its mark, even after the residents of the Albany landfill community have been dispersed. Many of the seven artists showcased lived at the landfill with her, and contributed their works, which include painted pieces, sculpture and photography. The exhibit will be open until the end of the month, Tuesday-Saturday from noon to 7:00 p.m. The gallery's address is 333 15th Street.

Anthony stumbled into the curator role because she, quite frankly, "knows everybody." As a board member of both the Albany Homeless Task Force and the Alameda County Healthcare for the Homeless organization, Anthony has served as a bridge for the houseless community and the housed people in the East Bay for over ten years.

Anthony laments that many people have no idea that an houseless art community exists. Putting the exhibition together has been a way to combat that. "I was tired of people

Gallery continues on page 5

Remembering Julia Vinograd: the Bubble Lady

The beloved poet died in early December, leaving behind a legacy of poems that capture a bygone Berkeley

By Benjamin Schneider







Top: Julia Vinograd in her Berkeley apartment (courtesy of John Storey)

Bottom: A portrait of Vinograd blowing bubbles in the "History of People's Park" mural on Haste Street (Alastair Boone)

JULIA Vinograd—resistance icon, the Bubble Lady, Berkeley's very own bard—died on December 4 after a long battle with colon cancer. She was 74.

Vinograd has been a staple of Telegraph Avenue since the late 60's, selling poetry books, blowing bubbles, and watching the world go by. She was a neighborhood icon, as reliable as the Berkeley Inn or Cafe Mediterraneum, and many of the other physical landmarks of Berkeley counterculture that are starting to vanish.

But Vinograd's influence remains, even in her absence. Through her poetry, she captured the character of the lost, the misfits, the downtrodden, the disinherited, and the abandoned—all of the people who built Telegraph into the landmark it is today. "Living in poverty herself, she's stuck to her guns and kept writing poetry for well over 30 years," reads a Street Spirit article from 2005.

"She's written so many poems about this neighborhood, about the park," said Ed Monroe, an artists and street vendor who founded the Telegraph Avenue Street Fair. "She's our poet of this neighborhood."

Though many know her for her poems, Vinograd also played an active role in shaping the physical environment of Telegraph Avenue—namely, through the preservation of People's Park. "Nobody knows this story, but I was there and I know it's true. Julia is one of the big reasons the park looks the way it does today" Monroe said.

In 1979, a group of homeless activists were gathered in People's

'She was not a loud, outspoken member of the community—she was just Julia.'

Park, playing guitar and singing songs in opposition to a new, student-only parking lot on the west side of the park. All of a sudden, about fifteen police officers arrived with a bulldozer. "It looked like a military operation," Monroe said.

The bulldozer was there to remove the logs separating the field and the parking lot, although no one knew exactly why this needed to be done. Nonetheless, the protest was disrupted, as the bulldozer began to remove the first log. While the protesters scrambled in confusion, "Julia Vinograd said, 'Let's sit on the logs,'" Monroe recalled.

Following Vinograd's lead, the protestors sat on the remaining logs, setting in motion a standoff with police that lasted the rest of the day, and attracted countless more protesters. By evening, Berkeley Mayor Gus Newport ordered the police out. "The sun went down, and people went and got picks and shovels and started peeling the asphalt up," Monroe said. The next morning "there were trees and bushes where there used to be a parking lot."

Thus began the people's demolition of the parking lot in People's Park, hardly a vestige of which still exists. The current look and feel of the park might be one of Vinograd's most tangible legacies. "It really was her. It was that moment when she exhibited that leadership," Monroe said. "She was not a loud, outspoken member of the community, she was just Julia. Sometimes almost understated, the way she was. A lot of times that's more powerful."

Vinograd's understated presence could in part be because of her limp, a legacy of a childhood bout of polio. In fact, her limp was the reason she became the bubble lady. Having recently arrived returned to Berkeley, where she did her undergraduate studies, from the University of Iowa Writer's Workshop, Vinograd stepped into an intense activist culture. During the initial People's Park Uprising in the spring of 1969, Vinograd wanted to participate, but couldn't enter the melee due to her leg. Her solution: Blow bubbles in the midst of the chaos. The community was charmed by her act of quiet resistance, and from that point onward, bubbles became a key part of Vinograd's identity.

Those who read her poetry were struck by its stark, and brutally honest portrayals of street life in Berkeley. Vinograd's work "showed me a little bit of the dark side of Berkeley," said Marco Lazo, one of many Telegraph Avenue vendors with whom she has traded wares.

Vinograd's countless hours selling poetry in the street, and the time she spent at the Rag Theater and, in more recent years, Cafe Med, made her a widely known Berkeley personality.

At a recent poetry reading at Harold's Art House, held as a fundraiser for Vinograd's medical expenses, local activist Michael Delacour was struck by the turnout. "I couldn't believe the amount of people that she had there," estimating a crowd in the hundreds over the course of the night. "There were people there all the way from Las Vegas. I realized that she had a lot of support." Vinograd's words travelled widely, too. Her publisher Bruce Isaacson estimated she has sold 150,000 copies of her 68 poetry collections.

As her old haunts, like Cafe Mediterraneum and the Berkeley Inn, closed their doors, People's Park remained a constant in Vinograd's life. "I don't think there was one time that she didn't do a poem at the anniversary," Delacour said. With People's Park's 50th anniversary coming up this spring, it, too, is under threat of closure once again. A new generation of activists who hardly knew her will surely miss her creative and peaceful forms of resistance. Those on both sides of the impending People's Park fight will be wise to remember Vinograd's words from "People's Park":

"There are many hearts buried in People's Park,/ and part of my own as well./ Oh leave them alone."

Benjamin Schneider is a freelance journalist living in San Francisco

On the street
By Julia Vinograd

I'm not here, don't look at me.
Don't scream when your children look at me,
do you think bad dreams are contagious?
Do you think I'll breathe bad luck on your children?
Suppose you'd spent the afternoon
shining in your lover's bed
and then brought him home to meet your parents
and they screamed
"Don't touch that, you don't know where it's been!"
You can't see me,
I'm just a crack in your contact lens;
I'm just a crack in your mirror.
My hands are dirty.
I've got your shadow under my fingernails,
I can't wash it out.
I've got the shakes,
my own skin isn't speaking to me
and I'm not speaking to you.
I'm not here, I have no past,
no memories, no name, not allowed.
So I eat your memories like garbage,
all your buried broken promises
and the bad dreams you forget
till you see me. Till you don't see me.
I'm not here.



Portraits of a young Vinograd
(Photos courtesy of John Storey)

Selected poems by Julia Vinograd

People's Park

We will defend this place
Till the last drop of beer
And the first drop of rain.
People's Park
The wizards in old tales used to bury their hearts in secret places
And unless you dug up the heart and destroyed it
They were invulnerable and heartless.
Part of my heart is buried in People's Park.
Not all of it.
not even the largest part --
Other places, people, and I'm no wizard so I keep some of it myself.
Part of my heart is buried in People's Park.
Leave it alone. It's the part that will never be reasonable
never grow up and know better and do worse.
It's young.
Breathing is sweet to it and wild and scary.
It remembers meeting soldiers' bayonets with daffodils.
It remembers tear gas drifting over swing sets.
It will always be young.
Leave it alone.
I go to the Park sometimes to talk to it -- not foten.
Time passes and it doesn't always recognize me.
But it tells me there are many hearts buried with it
All young, all proud of what they made and fought for.
Do not disturb them.
Do not build on them.
Do not explain that times have changed.
Do not tell them it's for their own good.
They've heard that before.
They will not believe you.
There are many hearts buried in People's Park,
and part of my own as well.
Oh leave them alone.

Street Crazy Playing the Flute

Her mind ran over her face like a train wreck.
What was left twitched, at off moments.
But she played a wooden flute
as if her hands belonged to someone who never worried.
Thin shoulders huddled around the music, stuck in a pile of clothes that would rather be in a closet.
Might've been young if she'd been someone else.
A cold grey evening.
People hurried off the street before it didn't rain,
nobody stopped to watch her play.
She blew elbow-shaped notes and chords stamping like boots for warmth, almost a crowd
but no faces, she always had trouble with faces.
Inside, people made dinners.
Hospital food had been beef stew without the beef
and frightened jello.
Her flute craved candied roses and catastrophes.
She'd passed a restaurant once.
Thru the window she'd seen lobsters piled on a tray
and bright small sharp instruments either for cracking shells or brain surgery .
Her flute poured out soft warm butter-sauce
into the cold evening till if you were a lobster
you'd love to be eaten. She'd been 51/50'd briefly.
She hadn't noticed enough to be annoyed except they defined her flute as a hard object
and took it away. Now she had it back.
What would've been a smile for someone else
crawled onto her face.
Her flute played Mount Rushmore for a closing flourish,
not president's faces (she always had trouble with faces)
but a mountain-sized hot fudge sundae with a cherry.

John the Baptist on the Street

Skinny, tattered jacket, tangled wild beard,
sharp knees on the sidewalk
outside a sandwich and salad shop;
a John the Baptist woodcut.
Someone had given him a plastic container
of salad-to-go instead of spare change.
He howled, head thrown back,
dirty fingers clawing limp cringing lettuce
till even the celery whimpered and bled.
His rage worked magic on mayonnaise and carrot peelings.
They became the torn fur of a small desert animal that didn't get away.
He snarled, scattering bones in all directions.
John the Baptist turns wherever he is into desert.
He preaches to stones, lizards and cactus in their own language.
When the cops came on a noise complaint he didn't fight them the way he fought his salad.
He didn't answer their questions, only waited.
Either they'd go away or take him away.
Either way they weren't real to him.
Messiahs come and go, like the tide, in and out
but the Baptist's still blocking the sidewalk,
raging, radiant and waiting.

Sparechangers

The crowd shrugs off their eyes like soggy spitballs.
A grunge tribe share day-old donuts in the rain,
their belts low slung
down to the crack in their butts.
A wheelchair veteran with ghostfires licking at his wheels.
Empty paper cups on mock fishing poles.
Their chants aren't words anymore,
"spare change" is spoken dandruff
and must be brushed away;
what would a girl say if a new shirt gets covered with begging dandruff?
Not even cruelty. Sometimes I wish it were.
The crowd hates the other football team or politicians
but they don't hate what doesn't exist.
The stolen shopping cart isn't there,
even though it's pushed by a skinny scream
piled high with junk and topped with a toy pink plastic phone.
Lovers leaning into each other
in a winter doorway aren't there.
A mother aiming her crying child at the crowd isn't there.
Sparechangers spend their days being erased like typos.
Saying "I am so alive, I'm here, sort of," is hard, mind-breaking work.
Goth girls play at being vampires
but it's spare changers who cast no reflections,
no one wants to see.
If a tired guy with a cardboard sign has a small fuzzy puppy,
the puppy gets a smile.
The crowd feels guilty enough about people they love;
there's no guilt left over for anyone else.

STREET SPIRIT

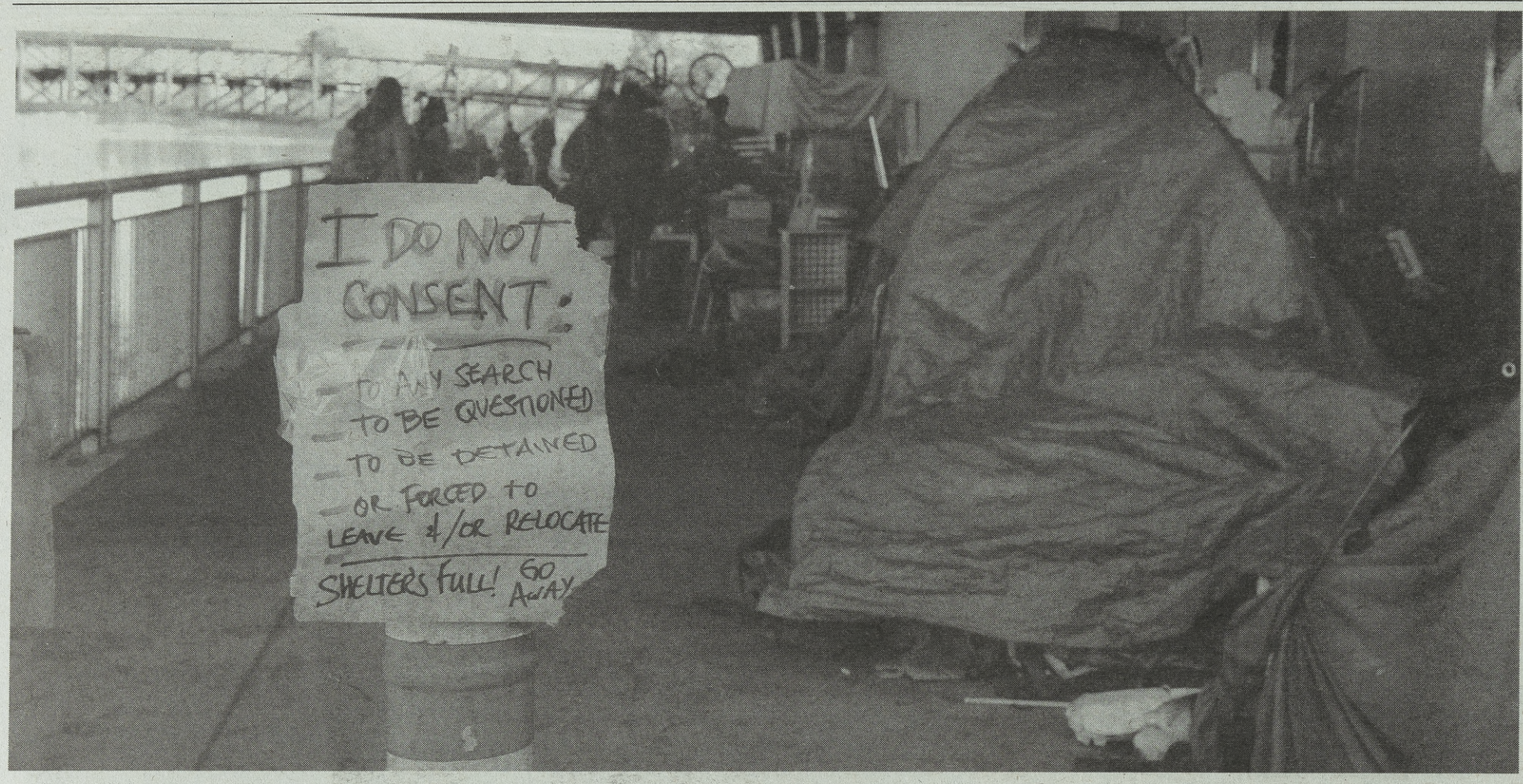
Justice News & Homeless Blues in the Bay Area

A publication of Youth Spirit Artworks

Alastair Boone
Editor in Chief

Alejandro Ramos
Managing Editor

Do you have a tip, or feedback about the paper? Please email us at streetspiritnews@gmail.com



"The more they...shuffle us around the city, the more people get agitated and ready to take this to the next level."

Year from page 1

who can help them obtain health care, long-term housing, employment, and more. And Oakland recently announced another foundation-funded initiative to prevent homelessness by providing legal representation for low-income tenants facing eviction. If it works, it could help hundreds of people a year avoid *ending up on the streets.*

Still, many activists and homeless people criticize Oakland for not doing

'Repression breeds resistance.'

more. Some homeless people also say that cities like Oakland continue to punish unsheltered people by enforcing policies that make life on the streets needlessly difficult and hazardous. Camp closures, in particular, have become a contentious issue due to the fact that the number of unsheltered people far outstrips the number of shelter beds, making camping a necessity for thousands.

The *Tuff* Shed program is now the subject of controversy because of how it's being deployed to justify closing existing, self-organized homeless camps, and to enforce camping bans in large geographic areas around Oakland, such as the perimeter of Lake Merritt.

Nino Parker, a homeless resident and activist who leads a camp of elders on the southeastern edge of Lake Merritt, has emerged over the past year as one high-profile critic of the city's approach to the homelessness crisis. In October, Parker and others resisted the closure of camps across the Lake Merritt channel from the city's third Tuff Shed camp. Parker has also been organizing around programs to improve the lives of homeless people and lobbying for the city to directly pay the homeless to clean parks

Candice Elder, CEO of the East Oakland Collective, a group that organizes to provide resources at homeless camps, said the city homeless encampment eviction program has created chaos. "It's bad because each Tuff Shed camp can only hold 40 people while they evict an entire geographic area near the Tuff Sheds in which there's up to hundreds of other people. The homeless get scattered around the city."

Elder argued that by closing down camps in the downtown and around affluent areas like Lake Merritt, the city has needlessly caused homeless *camps to consolidate and grow,* particularly in lower-income parts of Oakland.

In Berkeley, homeless people and their allies have also been challenging the city's camp closures. "The city evicted us 17 times between October 1, 2016 and January of 2017," said Mike Zint, a formerly homeless activist, about a running conflict between one group of campers and the city over the past two years.

The camp, which its members called itself "First They Came for the Homeless," continued to be evicted throughout 2018, even though its members had filed a federal civil rights lawsuit against the city alleging their constitution rights were violated.

Last year, a federal judge dismissed some of the weightier legal issues in the case, but the lawsuit is still active. In September, the judge hearing the case allowed for the plaintiffs—several homeless Berkeley residents—to certify as a class to represent the broader Berkeley homeless community and pursue claims that the city has violated their Fourth and 14th Amendment rights by allegedly confiscating and destroying their property during camp closures.

Another camp in Berkeley also protested the city's efforts to enforce a vehicle camping ban this past summer. In July, Berkeley's city manager ordered the owners of about two dozen RVs, buses, and other assorted vehicles to leave the Berkeley Marina parking lot or have their vehicles towed. The camp's residents organized against the plan and lobbied the city council to reverse course, but ultimately the parking lot was closed down to overnight camping.

It was in Oakland, however, where the most contentious legal battle occurred this past year. In October, a group of about 14 homeless people took over a vacant and unused city-owned property in East Oakland and established a camp they named "Housing and Dignity Village." The city quickly notified the campers they were trespassing and that in 72 hours the site would be closed.

Housing and Dignity Village was only the most recent incarnation of an intentional sober space organized by a group of homeless activists. They first coalesced in January of 2017 at Grove Shafter Park in North Oakland where they built makeshift tiny houses and an outdoor kitchen. Citing health hazards and complaints from neighbors, the city closed the camp, so the group next moved onto another plot of city-owned land on E. 12th Street at 23rd Avenue, next to an existing camp.

"The Village," as the 23rd Avenue iteration of the camp became known, repeatedly clashed with city officials about whether they had any right to reside on this property or build structures. There were also several large fires at the location as more homeless people moved onto the

'The city evicted us 17 times between October 1, 2016 and January of 2017'

site while nearby camps were closed down.

By the time they ended up at their last location in deep East Oakland, the group was determined to make a stand. They filed a federal lawsuit on Nov. 9 claiming their constitutional rights against cruel and unusual punishment and due process were being violated due to the city's lack of shelter beds and the need for the homeless to live somewhere. For this reason, they argued that the city should be blocked from closing the camp.

The lawsuit drew on the recently decided Martin v. Boise case in which the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals found that laws that criminalize camping and sleeping in public, as well as other basic life-sustaining activities, are unconstitutional if a city lacks adequate shelter spaces for its homeless population.

A federal judge granted a restraining order to temporarily prevent the city from closing the camp, but ultimately the judge disagreed with the Housing and Dignity Village and ruled that the city could follow through with the eviction because the city wasn't punishing the homeless camp's residents "for acts inherent to their unhoused status that they cannot control." Rather, the judge ruled that the homeless don't have a right to indefinitely occupy specific parcels of public property. The ruling led to a hasty and chaotic eviction on December 6.

Anita de Asis, one of the organizers of Housing and Dignity Village, said the lawsuit is still proceeding even though the camp was closed. The homeless residents say they still plan to show the judge evidence that the city's approach to homelessness doesn't respect people's constitutional rights.

But regardless of what happens in court, de Asis predicted that homeless residents will increasingly agitate against camp closures and for the right to occupy public spaces as long as the city lacks adequate shelter.

"Repression breeds resistance," she said. "The more they try to herd us into Tuff Shed camps or take away our sanitation or shuffle us around the city, the more people get agitated and ready to take this to the next level."

This article originally appeared in the East Bay Express.

Darwin BondGraham is a staff writer for the East Bay Express.

Marion Morris: Street Sheet vendor, role model

By Sylvia Sawislak

MARION Morris, also known as "Red", sells Street Sheet in Downtown Berkeley, just outside the BART station. He wears bright red sunglasses and a red plaid shirt, which is how he picked up his unique nickname. "People call me Red. I wear red most of the time," Morris said.

Morris, who is 69, lives in Berkeley. He started selling Street Sheet—San Francisco's homelessness advocacy newspaper—several years ago when he worked across the bay. He says that even though he is retired, he still sells the paper because he loves the messages it conveys.



"You can put out what's happening...people who have actually lived this life," he said. "I love the paper, and talking to the people about my testimony."

Morris was born and raised in Waco, Texas. He describes his childhood as fun and eventful. " I was in the Boys Club when I was seven years old. Very fun and I learned everything." He did lots of sports at the Boys & Girls Club, such as swimming, basketball, and hockey. He also went to many rodeos, which he says were a popular pastime in his hometown.

In 1971, he moved to East Oakland. He lived on 23rd Avenue by San Antonio Park, where he got caught up in the city's crack epidemic. "I had a long road of drugs and alcohol. Those were real, real struggles," he said.

In the throes of his addiction, Morris lived on the street for five years. He was in East Oakland for a total of 17 years before he moved to San Francisco and started working at ToolWorks, a non-profit organization that helps homeless people find rehabilitation and get work.

Morris had a number of jobs in San Francisco. He describes working at the Orpheum Theater, back in 1995. "I seen every Broadway play, working for the theatre," he said, such as Tap Dogs, The King and I, Show Boat, and many others.

In 2003, Morris was attending Laney College and studying electronics and nutrition when he met his wife. Now, they have been married for seven years. They live together in an apartment in Downtown Berkeley.

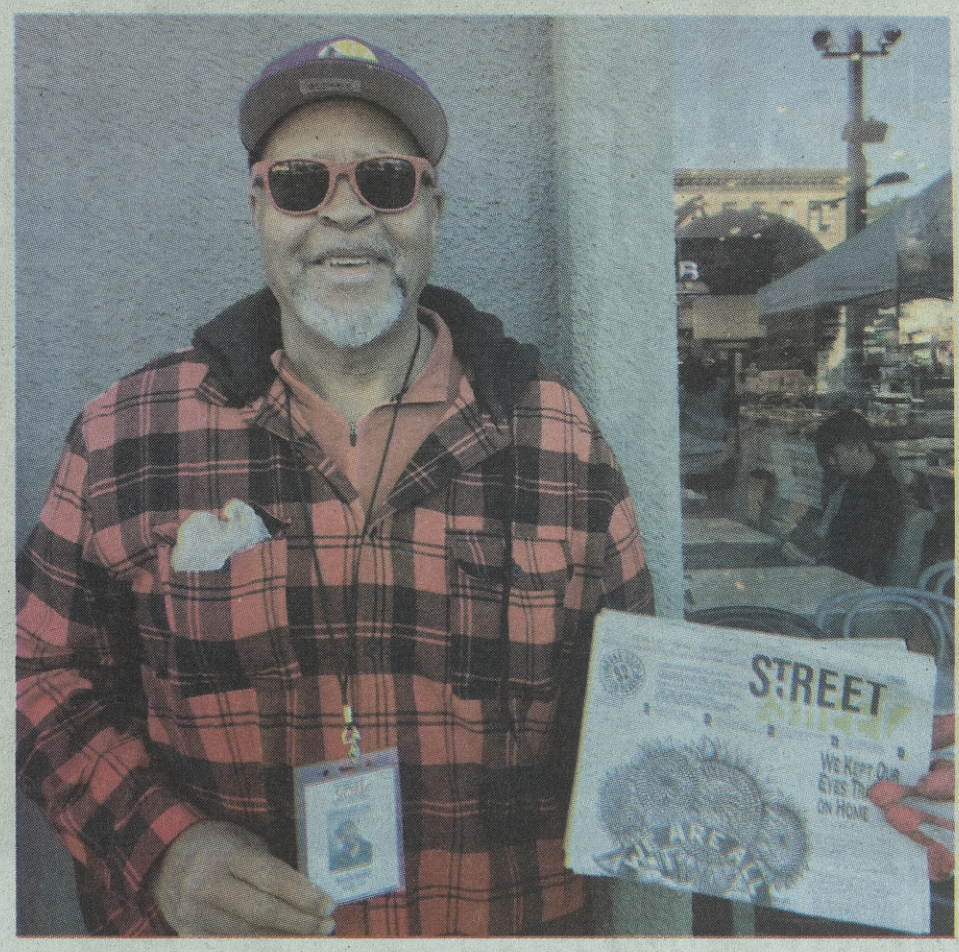
Morris loves Berkeley. "You can protest and walk around Berkeley and say how you feel." He knows many people in Berkeley and still sees them to this day, and communicates with them. In Berkeley, he feels you can wear what you want to wear and say what you want to say.

"There is no place like Berkeley in the whole United States. It's awesome. And people are so nice here. They will help you if you want to help yourself."

A typical day for Morris starts with waking up at 5 a.m., going to the gym, and doing a little work out at City Sports. Then, he comes out and starts selling papers. He says he typically begins selling around 8 am. He ends his day by eating with his wife at their apartment.

Morris is also a dedicated member of his church, which he has been attending for the past two years. "I go every Sunday," he said. He has been going there for the past two years. His favorite movie is a Christian Program called Jimmy Swaggart.

Though he is retired, Morris has strong dreams and aspirations for the future—both for himself and for the country. As someone who was homeless for five years, he hopes to open up a printing press where he can help share stories of homeless people on the streets.



Morris holding a copy of Street Sheet in Downtown Berkeley (Sylvia Sawislak/Street Spirit)

He also strongly hopes that the people in the South, by the border, will be let into this country. He says, "they should be allowed in this country. The ones coming in the right way. We don't need the ones with drugs or in gangs but I support them down there."

He feels passionately about helping others in bad situations, and tries to give as much as he can. "I try to be a role model," he says, describing his relationships with old friends who are still living on the street. "I say, 'get you some papers [to sell]. You don't have to hold a sign.'"

Street Spirits is a monthly column in which someone who has experience living on the street tells us their story.

Sylvia Sawislak is a participant at Youth Spirit Artworks who focuses on helping with Street Spirit. She is a senior at Berkeley High School.

Oakland gallery exhibit intended to bring housed and unhoused people together

***Gallery** from page 1*

saying that we were all disgusting or addicts," she said. "I want to show what we can do, what we like to do."

Anthony and Mary Weather proprietor and designer Judy Elkan met on the Oakland-based Homeless Advocacy Working Group (HAWG). Elkan has been working in Oakland on Mary Weather's main business, screen printing on clothes, since 2009.

As well as designing clothes, Elkan worked for a few years in homelessness advocacy, but was frustrated by what felt like a lack of serious impact. "I realized that what could really help this issue is bringing the housed and unhoused communities physically together," she said.





Left: April Anthony (left) and Judy Elkan (right) Right: Artwork by Dano (photos by Kate Wolffe/Street Spirit)

To do this, she began opening her boutique up for events like birthdays, and more recently, Thanksgiving, where housed residents came together with their unhoused neighbors. "It's been really beautiful to open up that kind of space," she said.

One of the residents that is heavily featured in the show is a houseless artist named Dano, whose colorfully-painted mannequin stands out among his other eye-catching works, which are inspired by both pop-culture and tribal design. Dano, who was trained informally, attended the opening and expressed nerves at having his art displayed. Although he has been drawing and creating for as long as he can remember, this is only the second time his art has been shown publicly.

The art is available for purchase. Elkan and Anthony aren't sure exactly how the profits will break down, but suspect that 70 percent of the profits will go to the artist, 20 percent will go to the space and curator, and 10 percent will be donated to a cause that benefits the unhoused community.

Houseless artists can get in touch with Anthony about being featured by emailing samples of their artwork—including a statement or short bio—to aprilanthony7@gmail.com.

To those involved, the opening of the gallery feels like a step in the right direction.

"Housed people need to see the other side," Anthony said. "It's needed to see your houseless neighbors and what they do."

Kate Wolffe is a journalist who lives in Berkeley



A banner on the gate around Housing and Dignity Village (Alastair Boone/Street Spirit)

HDV residents say: "we are going to the street tonight."

Housing and Dignity *from page 1*

with [the encampment]," said Stephanie Blackmore, who lives in an apartment one block away from the vacant lot where the encampment sat. "There haven't been any problems. It's never loud, it doesn't smell like weed when we walk by."

But almost immediately after this community formed in East Oakland, the city attempted to remove it. They first received a notice to vacate for November 10, just two weeks after settling in the vacant parcel. But the residents did not want to leave. "We are houseless, but this is our home," Needa Bee.

To resist the notice to vacate, they filed a temporary restraining order against the city. Needa Bee, who has taken up a self-study of the law, drew up the restraining order herself to postpone the eviction. With the help of attorney Joshua Piovia-Scott, the residents also filed a civil rights lawsuit against the City of Oakland, Mayor Libby Schaaf, and Assistant City Administrator Joe Devries. The lawsuit claimed that evicting the residents would violate their 8th Amendment rights—a precedent set by the recent Martin v. Boise decision—as well as their 14th Amendment rights.

Their case was heard on November 13 in front of District Judge Haywood Gilliam in Oakland's Ninth Circuit Court, less than a month after the encampment was founded. Ultimately, Judge Gilliam ruled that the residents of HDV did not have the right to remain on city-owned land indefinitely. By November 26, he had lifted their restraining order, saying that the city's claim that it could provide shelter beds to each of the 13 residents disqualified them from the protections established in the Martin v. Boise decision. (The civil rights lawsuit is still pending.)

Disheartened, the residents braced themselves. It wasn't long before they received their second notice to vacate, this time for December 5. That morning, homeless activists and their advocates showed up in force, and by the time the police and Public Works employees had arrived, more than 50 people had surrounded the fence around the encampment. The residents stayed inside, standing guard over their home.

City officials spoke with residents through the fence for five hours. Just before noon, they agreed to leave without evicting anyone.

"They said that there would be no eviction that day or the next day. That we'd have a meeting to negotiate," said Candice Elder, Founder and CEO of the East Oakland Collective, a member-based community organizing group. "I said 'okay so there will be no eviction? You're all leaving?' They said 'yes.'"

The residents and their advocates erupted in applause. "I really appreciate it from the bottom of my heart," HDV resident Ayana Johnson said as she addressed the crowd of supporters. "If the whole city did this, we wouldn't be fighting about some little land. We'd all have something."

Elder says she exchanged phone numbers with the city officials, and that the group planned to be in touch in the coming days. "We were under the assumption that the meeting would happen," Elder said. "They made that promise to us. But it wasn't really a promise they could make."

'We were doing something right and good here.'

But at 1:00 p.m. the following day, police stormed Housing and Dignity Village, and broke the lock on the gate surrounding it. Many of the residents weren't there. Children were at school and adults were at work. No one had time to pack.

City officials were on the scene, observing the eviction from the sidelines. "There was no deal," Councilmember Larry Reid's assistant, Ray Leon, said as Public Works employees dismantled the encampment behind him. "We said we would ask Councilmember Reid and the City Administrator's office if they were willing to negotiate, and they said no."



HDV residents and volunteers (courtesy of Needa Bee)

The eviction process was slow. Department of Public Works employees were dismantling Housing and Dignity Village until midnight, throwing away tents, shoveling the dirt and flowers from the community garden into dump trucks and using drills to take the tiny homes apart, screw by screw.

As the eviction dragged on, a crowd gathered in protest.

"They were helping us so we could help ourselves and not die in the streets. Whatever I needed — a pair of socks, water," Denise Draper, who sleeps in her car, yelled at police officers and city workers outside the fence as the encampment was being dismantled. "Anyone can become homeless at any time. You're standing on your feet now. God will knock you down."

At the end of the night, four residents of the Housing and Dignity community chained themselves to the inside of one of the tiny homes, and refused to move. Police had to remove them in handcuffs (ultimately, nobody was detained, and each of the residents were released onto the street.)

In the background, residents and supporters yelled loudly in protest. "We are all people. We bleed the same and our bones break the same. We were doing something right and good here," said an HDV resident who wished to remain anonymous. "We are going to the street tonight."

All of the encampment's 13 residents are now either living in their cars, couch surfing, or back on the street.

"What the city was offering was inadequate. One of the shelter options was outside of Oakland, and that wasn't going to work for most if not all of them." said Elder. "One resident with a teenage child they were going to put up into a hotel for a few days until they could find him something. They were still looking for shelter that takes cats."

Furthermore, Elder says that city officials explicitly stated that they were pushing other unhoused people off the waitlists for shelter beds to accommodate the residents of Housing and Dignity Village. "They refused. And rightfully so. They wanted to unify with other unhoused brothers and sisters, and not push people down the list."

Alastair Boone is the Editor in Chief of Street Spirit.

HDV residents respond to eviction in their own words

After being evicted from the home that they built, the HDV community shares their reflections with Street Spirit

COMMENTARY

Response from Housing and Dignity Residents Needa Bee, Kaleeo Alcatar, and Jodii Everett Le'Grande



Candice Elder (second from the right) with volunteers from the East Oakland collective helping to build HDV (photos on pages 7-8 courtesy of Needa Bee)

On Thursday December 6, without warning, the city administration violently evicted the 13 residents of the Housing and Dignity Village (HDV), a service hub at S Elmhurst Avenue and Edes Avenue in deep East Oakland. Over 20 Oakland Police officers were present to lead residents away in handcuffs, as Public Works employees worked overtime to destroy everything on site. On Thursday, the city led us to believe that they are liars, that we cannot trust a word they say, that they have absolutely no problem sanctioning violence against unhoused Black and Brown families.

Thursday's violent eviction of HDV followed a blocked eviction on December 5. For four hours, residents refused to move because in truth there was no adequate housing available for us. Folks from all over Oakland stood between us and the police. The people of Oakland made it clear that they did not support this eviction, and their presence prevented police and members of the Department of Public Works from entering. Candice Elder of the East Oakland Collective and Margaretta Lin of the Dellums Institute for Social Justice negotiated an alternative to eviction. After four hours in the rain, in front of a crowd of dozens, City representatives, member of Councilmember Larry Reid's office, and the Department of Human Services told HDV residents, advocates, lawyers and brookfield neighbors that HDV residents would not be evicted until all the residents, advocates, and a legal team could sit down to a roundtable discussion with the city about a viable solution.

The bonds we have created are like the frame and rafters of a home.

The City of Oakland's statement to the press, released shortly after officials left HDV on Wednesday claims that officials never agreed to pause evictions; that they did not agree to a roundtable meeting; that 15 residents were offered housing, and all residents accepted; and that the City would not throw away belongings. In reality, only 13 people lived at HDV, and the City's incorrect number reflects the level of effort they put in to actually do what they told the federal judge they would do. In truth, seven residents were not offered adequate housing. The remaining six were offered housing only after City officials and staff scrambled during that 4 hour negotiation period to "override" the shelter system and remove other unsheltered brothers and sister from waiting lists and shelter beds to accommodate HDV residents. This was told to our legal team and our advocates.

24 hours after agreeing to sit at a roundtable with us, city employees swarmed HDV in a surprise raid. The agreed-upon meeting never happened. None of us were offered shelter, our belongings were tossed and broken.

At the time of the eviction, most residents were off-site at work or handling business, the children were at school. During the eviction our children were in limbo, uncertain of what was going to happen and where they would go that night or the next. As for the four residents on site who were ambushed: One resident was working on a visual arts piece for the City of Berkeley Arts Commission, one resident was getting dressed to go to work, one resident was fixing the village generator station, one resident was resting. We were not allowed to pack. We were not given time to pack. Coverage by independent journalists, corporate media and social media streams showed that residents' belongings were trashed.

To this day none of us have received phone calls from the administration, or human services to check on our status. They do not know where we are and they have no indication of the consequences of their lies and violent eviction on our safety and stability. We and all other unsheltered Oaklanders are not their concern—as long as we are out of sight they are happy. As long as we are not doing for ourselves and the neighborhoods they neglect, they are happy.

Yesterday one of us called a shelter we were told would provide us with housing. When the mama identified herself as a member of the HDV, she was informed that the shelter worker is not allowed to talk about anything related to HDV and hung up on her. She and her children remain on the streets, as do the rest of us.

We have asked several times why are we being evicted. Why does the city insist we are criminals and our attempts to assert our need and right for sanctuary are illegal? We are clean and sober, we are highly organized, we are the only encampment explicitly serving women and their families. We are the only encampment providing services and resources to our housed and unhoused neighbors. Why us? Our questions were met with silence. The other encampments on public land are left alone at best, at worse they are neglected—even when they are in deep crisis, even when they are riddled with criminal behavior and violence. So why us?

We are certain it is because when we speak we are not only speaking for ourselves but for the at least 9,000 other unsheltered brothers and sisters in oakland. We were evicted in an attempt to silence us. We are also certain we were evicted as punishment for attempting to provide ourselves with sanctuary.

We hope that the Oakland City Council will take the higher moral ground and make decisions based on justice, integrity, equity, compassion and truth. We hope your fear of damaging your political careers will not deafen you to the moral outrage that the violent eviction and destruction of our home has sparked across the Bay Area.



The HDV community garden

We demand that the Mayor Libby Schaaf, as well as city officials and staff who broke their promise to us be held accountable for lying to us and the public.

We demand that the city cease all evictions and instead upgrade encampments. We believe California has more than enough wealth—much of it stolen from the Black, Indigenous, and Brown ancestors of people currently experiencing homelessness—to improve the quality of life of unhoused residents until permanent housing is available. We demand that special attention is paid to the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing report and recommendations.

We demand a new parcel of land for Housing and Dignity Village to rebuild our Home. The trauma that the mayor and her administration have caused our children is undeniable and unforgivable. The disruption caused in our lives for no good reason is unconscionable. The use of workers to destroy our belongings and violate our human right to assert our right to housing when the city has failed to do so is criminal.

How dare we seek shelter and safety from the streets. Who the fuck do we think we are to think we deserve basic human needs and rights? We are human beings, some of Oakland's most vulnerable, but also most resilient.

The Day After the Eviction—Response from Needa Bee, resident of Housing and Dignity Village and Program Director at the Meiklejohn Civil Liberties Institute

Yesterday we figured out where our important belongings were. We *regrouped. Rested. Worked* on a statement in response to the traumatic eviction and lying devils. Enjoyed Life. Brushed the rubble from our shoulders and laughed at the devils.

Where are we? Two of us are crashing at temporary spots. One of us is in a basement. One of us is in a tent. The rest of us are living in vehicles on the street. But I bet if you asked the city and staff who lied about giving us shelter and lied about not destroying our property they couldn't tell you where we are or how we are doing. Cuz there has been no followup to our whereabouts and safety since they destroyed everything and kicked us literally to the curb. But they would probably lie about that too.

For now, our home base is the street outside of the gates where the Housing and Dignity Village was. We are a community, a family, a unit. The bonds we have created are like the frame and rafters of a home. They cant crush and destroy that.

Last night a reporter was looking for a sob story. He asked me "how is everyone doing". I said "we are strong and resilient". He didn't like my answer. I didn't give him tears. The lying devils probably don't like that either.

The first time the city bulldozed the promise land village in West Oakland in

***Response** continues on page 8*

Response from page 7

2017, they only made us stronger. They awoke a movement. Clearly the devils don't learn from their mistakes.

We are already regrouping. We are already multiplying. We will be coming back. From 100 different angles.

There are at least 14,000 unhoused in the City of Oakland. And we have support from our housed neighbors all the way to the federal government.

We ain't done. We ain't dismantled. We ain't silenced. We ain't stopping.

Response from Ayat Jalal, resident of Housing and Dignity Village

In looking through documentaries, old news footage, our lives, and literature that has compiled over the years of constant fighting against oppressive laws, there is a central core. The cry for human rights has been the strength of the thread which has placed us shoulder to shoulder and heart to heart with every nation and race.

Our differences have not kept us from truth, politics have. Or differences have yet to keep us from coming to the aid of a child, a mother, or an elder in need, it has been our fear. Or allowance of an imposed ideal of who *we are to one another is to* blame. The police who come between us and our right to protest against an oppressive government (who are paid with our tax dollars) are to blame.

So too are we, each and every one of us who watch on TV as our fellow brothers and sisters are beaten, arrested, and forced to give up fighting for our children's future for a lack of support.

Even those on the front lines campaigning for the removal of unjust laws and treatment, both on the streets and in the courts, are somewhat to blame. Those who took an oath to uphold the constitution and protect our civil liberties dishonor that oath.

We have stood, sang, bled and cried together. But then what becomes of love when we are away from the clouds of tear-gas, the walls of cops, and their mountains of oppressive tactics used against us? We resume the same societal positioning we refused, or stepped out of in solidarity with one another, like we have fulfilled some duty. We adorn the programmed existence we were fed. We sever from the core of humanity, our one collective identity and strength.

When we revert to the clawing of animals rather than retain the nobility of person, we forget the solidarity we experienced in protest against a common threat. A threat to the very core of who we are, humans. And yet this threat remains even when we are not battling in the streets marching and protesting, in the courts or at a city council meeting nearest to you.

I realize, every time myself and others have developed homesteading encampments during this housing crisis, we are attacked by the city and the police, while the drug-filled camps are left alone. Many times I have stood in front of cops and explained to them how they basterdize their oath and democracy by criminalizing homelessness, trashing our camps, kitchens, donation areas along with supplies we give out to other people on the street.

However, in the past years something has been surfacing. I now accept that *the true frontline in the war* for humanity is a space between us when we are face to face with each other. The war for humanity starts with how we feel about ourselves and each other. The true battle tends to be against the societal program; of trusting no one, only money matters, go for self, just do you, or the government is working hard to straighten things out. NO they are not, YES it's on us.

Until we can put our human connection first in everything we do, just as we do when we protest, celebrate a championship or call for the resignation of a government official, any real change will be a hard process.

The police will continue to take the side of unjust mindless politicians. The police will constantly ignore their oath to uphold the constitution and stand for



Ayat Jalal making work on an art piece for the City of Berkeley Art Commission





Top: Preston Walker, otherwise kown as "Pastor Preston", sitting outside his tent
Bottom: Volunteers help build structures for HDV residents to live in

us and not an oppressive government. The battle will continue with no end in sight to the root problems we find ourselves facing amongst ourselves, until we understand we citizens keep this society going by choice. We must remember a true revolution starts with individuals adopting or drafting a way of providing *the basics for life's continuity,* not waring. To provide food shelter and clothing for one another. To correct imbalance in the way womb-men, mothers and children are treated. Revolution demands these things, and that men be for one another, for the health, well-being and continuation of the species towards peace, love and harmony for our families.

This is what has been taken from us that we must regain at the cost of all. Not a false belief in this system, that's not a great loss, just a hug realization for some. It is our very human existence which we have to reclaim, this is what we have had hijacked from us. Our very purpose for existing and parameters of being, is herded by an economic system that has become an all out dog fight to develop consumers and mindless voters. Who says this is the only way a society can be? I say no again.

This is a system set up for it's own continuation. This society is not set up for the balancing, enrichment, nor awareness of our existence in relation to who we are as individual cultures, or of being the only of our species on the planet. Society does not exist or have direction nor relation to our being human. We are communal and gain strength and comfort in community. So why are we made too cry, ask, demand our even fight for our basic needs as a species? Food, shelter, and clothing are so basic and central to our existence, before anything else. How is this government, society, or its laws humane? In failing to provide our allow such to be gathered and/or given, our society is a failure to our very existence.

We have all witnessed the deterioration of a government's want or desire *to care for its citizens.* At this point in my life I chose to convey to you my humanity and call to yours, for the benefit of all our children's-children's-children's futures. I wrote these lines in honor of our present lives in which we seem to only partially be conscious. I wrote these lines for The Village, which is a group that is successfully developing systems of living in the face of this housing situation which has created the displacement of people all over this nation. The Village and First They Came For The Homeless are providing a cure for the dis-ease that this economy has caused to our humanity. We need people to wake up, plug in, and hold ourselves, police, and government officials accountable and responsible for our collective humanity, before all else.

May we witness the peace experienced by others, through our thoughts and actions.

All things fatal and in good standing. Uhuru!

Response from Candice Elder, Founder and Executive Director of the East Oakland Collective

The City of Oakland is running with the narrative that the 13 residents of Housing and Dignity Village ("HDV) refused shelter, so they deserved eviction. Yes they did refuse the offer of temporary shelter beds. The 13 residents of HDV united together to ensure that all 13 would be offered shelter before anyone was evicted, and more importantly, refused shelter beds because the city was pushing other unhoused people down the list for shelter beds to accommodate HDV residents.

Shelter beds would have been more temporary than the Housing and Dignity Village these folks were evicted from. Some of the residents called shelter beds a "downgrade" to the clean, sober and intentional community where they were safe. HDV was their preferred temporary home, and it was more like a home. As of the day of the first eviction attempt on December 5, the City of Oakland was still scrambling to find beds for some of the residents that had pets and minors. Also, some of the shelter beds were offered outside of Oakland, and that would not have worked for most of the residents.

The City of Oakland is ignoring the recommendations of the UN to upgrade informal settlements and stop evictions until adequate housing is provided.

I believe the city also evicted this community faster than any other because a large piece of city owned property was reclaimed by the people, for the people. We need to have a public lands policy in place that not only includes deeply affordable housing, but also allows the use of public land to temporarily house the unhoused until there is more permanent solutions.

I am so proud of the residents of HDV. They continue to be examples of resilience and resistance.

#tellthetruthOakland
#homesforall
#upgradenotevict

Untitled
By Ayat Jalal

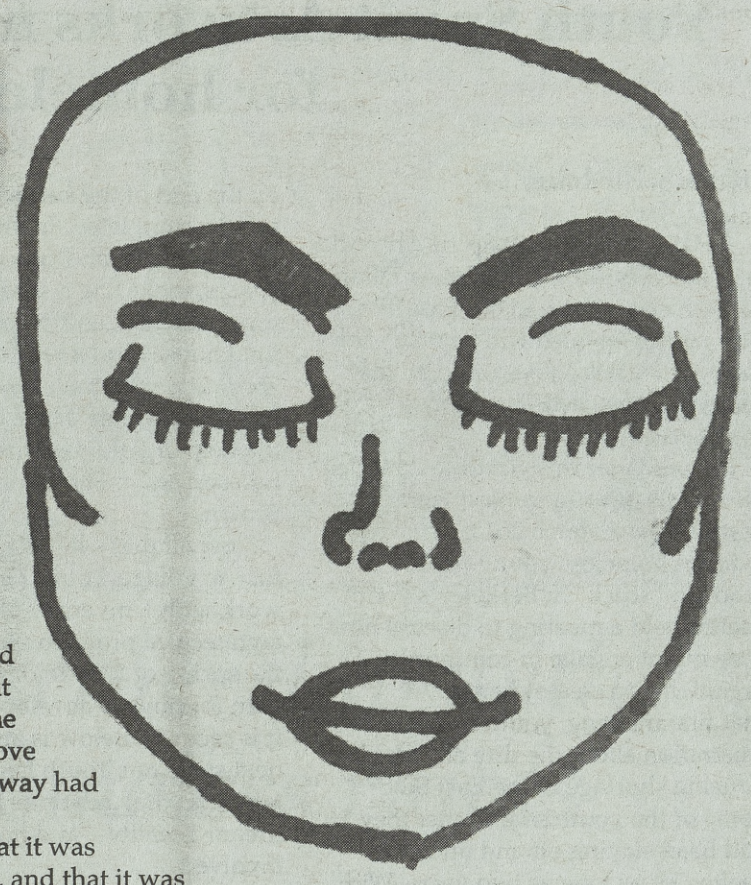
Coffins are not carpeted
There not for standing
Linoleum is useless
As the imagined dreams,
some believe they'll be having
The padding is for comfort
to those left standing,
Imagining death's visions
going over the width,
Linoleums length and pattern
hoping for a like padding.
Maddening.
How many comrades
died for standing.
For them
do more than stand.
Ancestral Spirits
Have no care for carpets
The padding useless as
linoleum in the streets.
Where some are taking back land
Because coffins are not carpeted
We must more than stand

SOCIETY IN 2120

PART II

FICTION

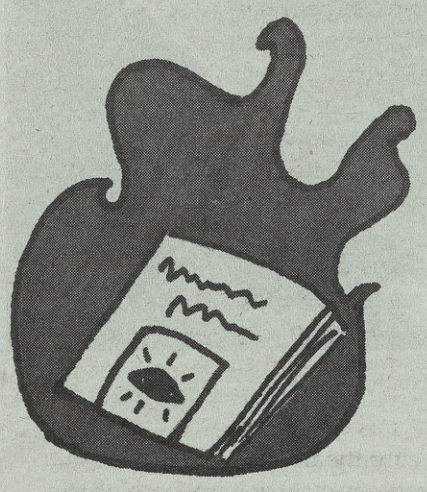
By Jack Bragen



Recap of part 1:

The force put out by the book, the evil force, was stronger. It was involuntary: I sat down in the chair at my table (a chair that I'd never sat on before) and I reached for the book...

I realized the pages were laminated and the binding had been reinforced. The book was fully readable. I read a few pages. My heart thumped, and my head pounded in its rhythm. My hands shook. I didn't understand



any of the text. I noted that the book was from the mid twentieth century—1964. This evil book was a hundred fifty years old.

I stood, and was then facing the dining table. The backs of my thighs trembled. It took all of my will to step away from this atrocity and go sit down on the soft chair. I had proper guilt over sitting in the soft chair. I closed my eyes, and my eyelids fluttered.

I was tempted to phone for a medical emergency. But, it would probably mean that I'd be put to death for possession of intellectual reading material. I was stuck. If I tried to dispose of this thing, someone would find it. If I tried to destroy it by means such as setting it on fire, it would set off the smoke alarm, and that would turn on the surveillance system. Anyway, I had no assurance that the surveillance system wasn't already activated.

I wanted to eat. However, I wasn't supposed to eat yet—it wasn't nine o'clock. In the refrigerator were cooked beans and rice noodles, and an egg that I could make. Or, in my cupboard, there was nutrition I could have from a can. Should I depart from the regimen? Maybe no one would know. I feared that Mr. Humulin would notice the guilt on my face the next day.

I sat for a while. I was supposed to play video games. Video games are correct.

It seemed odd that reading was a worse temptation than the lure of being with a woman. I'd been with a woman before. I was eighteen years old. A retired child-bearer had spotted me at a refueling station and had lured me to "try something new and interesting." I'd known full well that no contact with child-bearers was permitted unless on the order of the local AI Authority.

Afterward, I was severely punished. An ultra-pain device was attached to me for more than three days. It was a turning point in my life, wherein I'd killed the recklessness within me—and I was forgiven. But, reading a "book"? What was wrong with me?

In despair, I grabbed the video game unit from its hanger. I put the unit over my head. Soon, I should be doing what was expected.

I waited...the video game should have switched on by this time.

"Remove this unit. We detect a malfunction," the video game unit said to me. Malfunction? How could it malfunction?

"Remove this unit immediately."

I obeyed the command. I took the unit off the top of my head and I put

The primitives were better than we were. They could think.

it back. Sweat drenched me from head to foot. A green light came on above the entranceway to my dwelling. It was the surveillance system. They would spot the book. The AI Authority would probably put me to death.

It was over. I felt massive relief. Soon, I would be done with this uselessness called life. In resignation and curiosity, I went and sat in front of the book, and I began to read.

I awoke. I was on my sofa, a place where I shouldn't have been. The video game was on the floor in front of me and it had a blinking red light on it. I did not know what that meant. The green light above my front doorway had gone out.

I realized that it was quarter till six, and that it was almost time for work.

There was a butterfly in my gut, but it was not a pleasant butterfly. Why hadn't I been put to death?

I quickly showered and shaved. I got my mouthpieces from their container and put them in. I combed my hair, which continued to be of the proper length and neatness. I put on my monochrome outfit after retrieving it from the auto-clean unit. I grabbed my mini-screen, my identification, and my numb-pills. I exited, and a car hovered in front of me. I had kept it waiting for five minutes. It demanded an apology, which I gave abundantly. I got inside.

My thinking was different. The book had expanded my mind. The car ascended and accelerated, and it got onto the flight path. I looked at the illuminated signs, and at the total orderliness. People below looked like ants, all walking in formation. The buildings—you could not distinguish one from another.

I began to think about the book I'd read. It was primitive. The conditions implied by the text indicated that people once lived almost without any technology. They'd had ground cars made of sheet metal, of plastic, and with propulsion that turned rubber wheels on a smooth surface on the ground. But, had just the one book said all of this? No, it did not. Somehow, more knowledge of the past had gotten into my mind. I must have read books in the past and forgotten that I'd read them. How could this happen?

I was fifteen minutes into my commute, I looked at the city, and I began to cry. The primitives were better than we were. They could think.

Modern civilization had abdicated this. We were no better than the machines that supervised us, I cried some more. What had we done to ourselves?

It occurred to me that the car had passed the nondescript office building where I worked. There was no traffic issue. The vehicle headed beyond the giant maze of skyscrapers.

"Where are we going?" I asked the vehicle.

"I am taking you to the proper destination."

"No. We have passed by my office building."

"The destination has been assigned. I must do as instructed. Do not attempt to override and do not attempt to exit the vehicle."

As if to punctuate what it had said, the car abruptly accelerated and passed a cluster of vehicles that were flying at a normal speed.

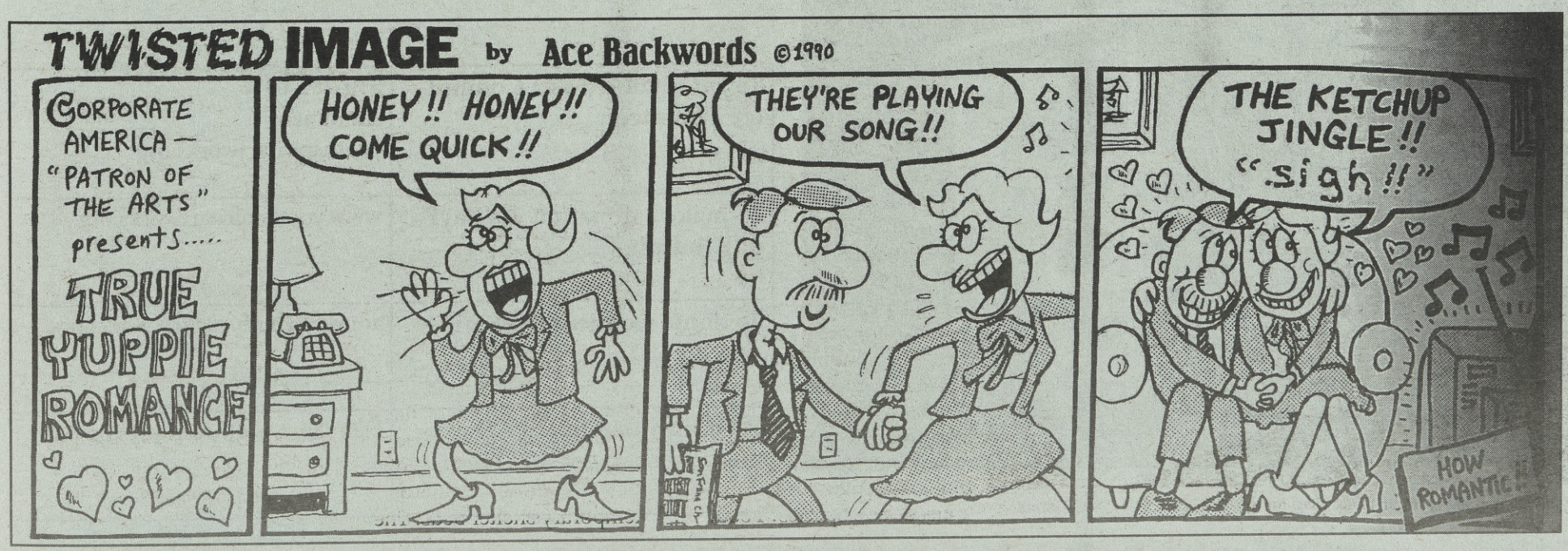
"Where are you taking me?"

The next chapter of "Society in 2120" will appear in the February issue of Street Spirit.

Jack Bragen is a writer who lives in the Bay Area. His most recent book, "An Offering of Power: Valuable, Unusual Meditation Methods," is currently available for purchase at LULU.com.

Illustrations by Jay Hill

Last month, we mistitled this story. We regret the error.



Youth Spirit Artworks makes progress on Tiny House Village for homeless youth in the East Bay

By Sally Hindman

THIS spring, Youth Spirit Artworks is going to build a Tiny House Village for homeless youth in the East Bay. The village—which will be ready for move-in by fall 2019—could be the first youth-focused Tiny House Village in America.

The seeds for this youth-led, model affordable housing project were sown back in March 2016, when over a dozen homeless young people who felt "stuck" in Berkeley's youth shelter held a meeting to discuss how they might engage in community organizing to create change. At that first meeting, youth expressed frustration about the dire affordable housing shortage in the East Bay. Some of the youth shared that they had been staying off and on at the shelter for as long as two years. With all their worldly belongings crammed into 3 ft x 3 ft lockers, they had no privacy and were tired of living on the floor of a church.

It isn't that youth don't appreciate the shelter, it's that no matter what they do to better their situations, there simply aren't enough affordable units anywhere they can be placed into. All the affordable housing projects in the East Bay are full—with multi-year waitlists of literally thousands of people waiting to be chosen for the first free unit that opens up.

But from that first rich dialogue in March 2016, hope sprang forth. The youth began to envision what it might be like to create an affordable housing community outside of Youth Spirit Artworks (YSA), where homeless youth could pay rent and live affordably in a wonderful arts-focused village of tiny houses.

Since then, YSA's Youth Leaders have worked like crazy tending their dream. The youth decided that the tiny homes will be built on trailers, making them easily moveable. The village will also make use of solar energy for electricity and heating. Per the youth's instruction, we are working on creating a "lease to buy" option for young people who become part of the community. And, the youth designed a Program Model for their village, including a community covenant and other written guidelines for the structure of the community.

With this plan in hand, the youth's vision for the Tiny House Village will begin to blossom in spring of 2019. We are going to host 12 build days throughout April and August, and by the end of the summer, the houses will be completed. In all, there will be 25 tiny homes and two community spaces, including a shared living room, kitchen, and bathrooms. The final house model was designed by six youth, who have already built a prototype of one of the houses with the help of volunteer architect Dan Edleson and mentor-contractor Tre Brown.

Now all that's left is finding a site for the village. Youth Leaders will work with University of San Francisco architecture professor Seth Wachtel in the spring of 2019 to design a master plan for how to develop the site, once it is secured. Below is an outline of the next steps our Youth Leaders will be taking as they continue to make this dream a reality—and how you can get involved.

Community Organizing and Identifying Sites

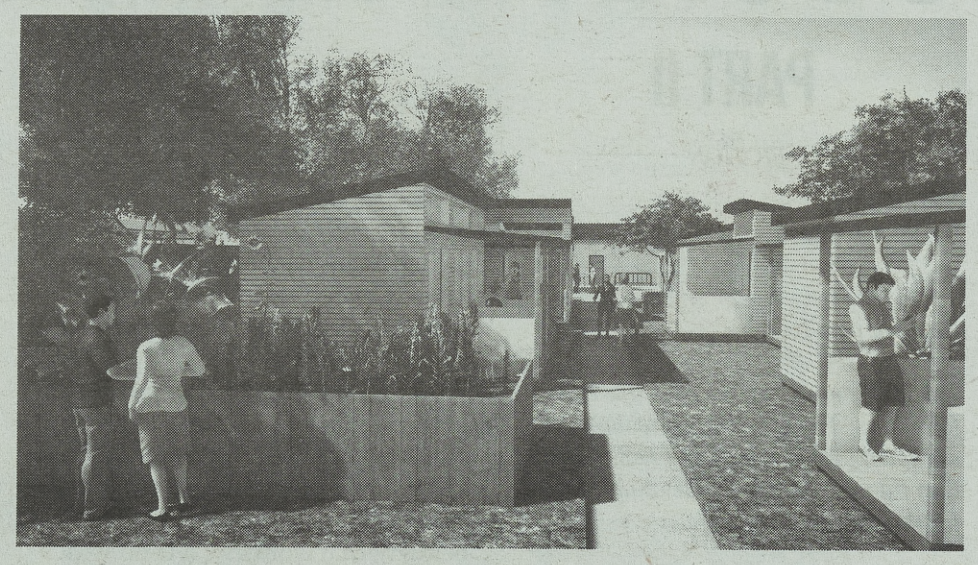
YSA hopes to identify at least a temporary site for the "builds" as early as January 15, 2019, while we finalize the permanent site for the village. We are particularly interested in identifying a religious congregation that might be willing to allow us to carry out our "builds" on a parking lot, or another congregation-owned property.

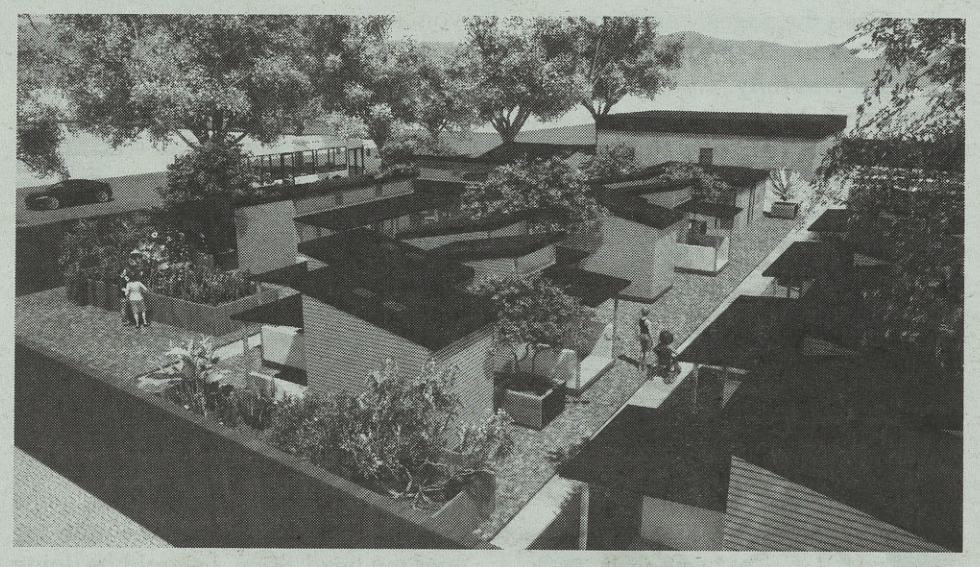
For the permanent site, YSA is currently looking for city-owned land in Oakland and Richmond for the Tiny House Village, but we remain open to other East Bay sites.

Inch by Inch Row by Row—Interfaith Congregation "Builds" and Partnership Support

A key element of the process YSA is using to create its tiny houses will involve work with the interfaith religious community. There are four Lead Congregations offering financial resources, as well as core volunteer supports in the "build" process. YSA was thrilled this fall when Berkeley's Congregation Beth El agreed to make our Tiny House Village their 2018/19 Tikkun Olam project, serving as our first committed "Lead Congregation."

Now, YSA will be approaching over fifty East Bay congregations and religious institutions over the next four months as we organize 60 to 100 volunteers for each of the 12 build days we will be holding. We are excited to enlist any and all congregations in the effort.





Mock-ups of the Tiny House Village. (Courtesy of Sally Hindman)

A Model for Other Cities Around the World

In summer 2018, Youth Spirit Leaders had the pleasure of meeting Aboubacar Komara, a recent UC Berkeley Deptartment of Architecture graduate. In 2018, Komara received a Judith Lee Stronach Baccalaureate Prize to create a tiny house village in Guinea, Africa. Youth Spirit Leaders voted in September to create a "sister relationship" with the Guinea Project, in which YSA youth and Komara's project would continue to share ideas and experience.

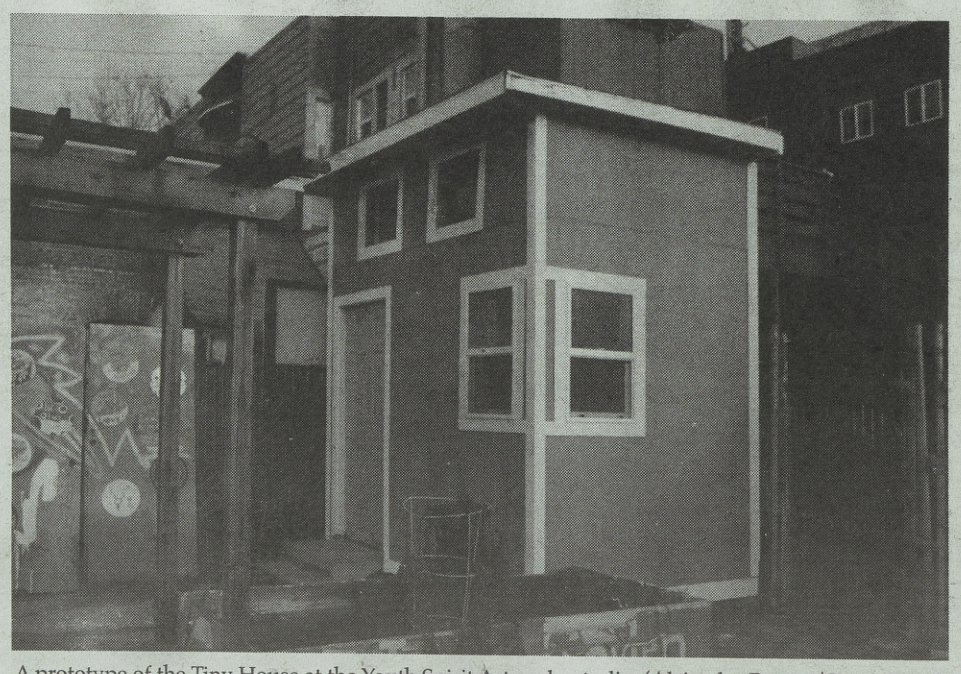
The vision expressed in the meeting is that each of the 25 houses in YSA's Tiny House Village might be developed to represent different cultures around the world in which tiny houses could serve as a solution to affordable housing. In this way, Youth Spirit Leaders will not only be developing perhaps the first youth Tiny House Village in the United States, but also leading the way in developing an affordable solution to poverty and slum-housing globally.

With thousands of people homeless, sleeping on our sidewalks and in tents, many people living in the East Bay believe that the dire housing crisis facing our poorest citizens is intractable and unsolvable. Youth Spirit Artworks Leaders are developing a project that shows a creative and uncomplicated solution to homelessness that is both affordable and replicable—as we continue to build diverse forms of long-term affordable housing.

Disclaimer: Youth Spirit Artworks is the publisher of Street Spirit.

Note: An illegible version of this article appeared in the last month's paper. We have published it again here so that it can be read in full. We regret the error.

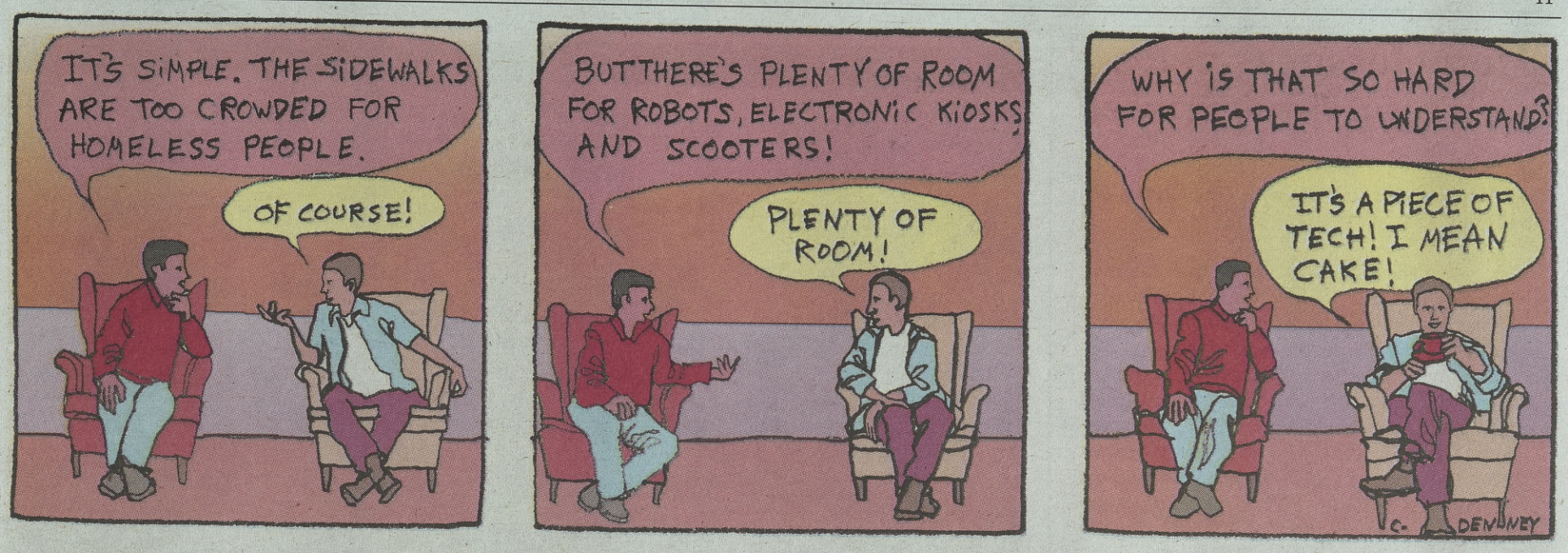
Sally Hindman is the Executive Director of Youth Spirit Artworks.



A prototype of the Tiny House at the Youth Spirit Artworks studio. (Alejandro Ramos/Street Spirit)

How to Get Involved

To get involved as a Committee Volunteer:	510-282-0396 shindman@ youthspiritartworks.org
To make a donation via PayPal or Kindful:	www.youthspiritartworks.org
To donte frequent flyer miles:	admin@youthspiritartworks.org
To learn about how your congregation can get involved:	Hannah@ youthspiritartworks.org



Berkeley prioritizes partnership with tech company over homeless rights

COMMENTARY

By Carol Denney

IT'S simple. Public sidewalks are too crowded for homeless people, but wide enough for waddling robots and monolithic, data-sucking electronic sidewalk billboards with 65-inch screens. Public sidewalks are dangerously over-filled with backpacks and bedrolls but have a sad aura of being deserted without unpermitted signboards, tables, chairs, and rolling racks of commercial merchandise. Personal belongings must not exceed a certain square footage on a sidewalk - for public safety's sake - but those same sidewalks would be downright lonely without scooters.

There's no inconsistency here. The visible presence of poverty makes people sad and makes governments look inadequate. People trying to panhandle enough for a night's shelter at the low-rent hotel make the 9.3 million expenditure on the renovated BART plaza look like a questionable set of priorities. Moving around the deck chairs is otherwise at least mildly entertaining.

The Berkeley City Council's agony over blankets and bedrolls blocking public sidewalks necessitating a raft of bewildering new restrictions was nowhere to be found in their haste to make way for 65-inch electronic screen kiosks spewing ads slated for those same public sidewalks.

If you're thinking, hmm, what 65-inch screen kiosks? you're not alone. Only a lucky few were invited to the initial meetings where "IKE Smart City Kiosks" were a done deal, a franchise agreement requiring "wayfinding" monoliths dot Berkeley's public sidewalks all over town—monoliths which cities like Raleigh, North Carolina, considered too tacky to tolerate. It's a twenty-five-year franchise agreement, according to the paperwork, and the "Interactive Kiosk Experience" is ready for "silent 24/7 operation". Marketing ads coming your way on your public streets and data-mining your information if you touch any one of the 31 "IKE" (Interactive Kiosk Experience) kiosks promising ad revenue not to your specific neighborhood, but to the city through the constant revolving marketing ads.

Yes, they look horrible. That's why the Smart City IKE people have spent eleven months "engaging with local stakeholders" to plan this thing in the dark. Somehow you were not invited. You'll be welcomed to a public meeting someday somewhere in a room packed with cheerleaders for these things, IKE staff and the robot and scooter crowd. They know they don't really have to sell a city council they've already nailed in a back room.

The electronic sidewalk billboards came no closer than the scooters did to visiting the various relevant community commissions. This was apparently an urgent matter. The latest sidewalk regulations similarly flew through the air and touched down first at the City Council because only the business improvement districts' opinions, after all, really matter. The community commissions' perspectives on matters before the Council, like the public's, are probably welcome. But apparently unnecessary. Mayor Arreguin has begun to telegraph his decisions even before opening public comment, in case you were under the curiously comic impression that your opinion was playing a role.

The BART plaza renovation renewed the debate over whether public places were cluttered to the point of jeopardizing public safety or, as the BART plaza revitalization jargon implied, were in need of "activation" necessitating even more public funds, programs, and organized activities to displace whatever horror might happen more naturally. "Controlled space" is the new black.

Note that at these hearings the start-up in question never really has to make a case. They just have to be patient so it looks like there's a process. Everybody on the inside knows the decision is already in the bank. And that if the whole enterprise plays out to be an embarrassment, the way those bright little donation boxes did, they'll disappear equally quietly so that nobody counts up the staff time and the other costs and brings it up at an inconvenient electoral moment.

After all, anybody who isn't enchanted with and salivating over scooters is probably some old fart who needs to make way for the latest jargon on transportation. It's kind of a cult. If they spend enough money on taming and cultivating their scooter concept through a pilot program, if they "educate" the public and constrain the complaint processes, they may, they just may, end up with something at least half as useful as the bus.

Carol Denney is a writer, poet, and musician who lives in the East Bay.

Help amplify homeless voices

If you would like to donate to *Street Spirit*, you can do so here:
www.youthspiritartworks.org/donate

Checks can be sent to:
1740 Alcatraz Avenue, Berkeley CA 94703



Do you want to be published in Street Spirit?

If you are interested in contributing to Street Spirit, please email us at streetspiritnews@gmail.com.

Homelessness news you may have missed

San Jose to Build and Open 80 Tiny Homes for the Unhoused

San Jose plans to open the tiny homes next summer, which will house formerly homeless people while they get back on their feet. In all, they will house 320 people, with the goal of 240 people moving into permanent housing over the next two and a half years. The pilot program will run at least through January 2022, when the state law that permits the homes is set to expire.

Most of the cabins will be 80 square feet on the inside, though a handful will be have 120 square feet of space for people with mobility challenges. All of the cabins will have windows, a light, a power outlet, a smoke detector, and a lockable door.



For the first year, there will be 24/7 security around the cabins—which will be formally known as bridge housing communities. They will be operated by a non-profit called HomeFirst, which will also provide a variety of services, such as career advice and healthcare resources. Residents will share bathrooms, showers, kitchen space, laundry facilities, and common areas with computers and internet access.

For rent, residents will be asked to pay 10 percent of their income, or $20 if they are not employed. Rent will go up by 10 percent every six months, with a cap of 20 percent. Residents must be employed or able to work. They cannot have convictions for arson, drug manufacturing, or sex offenses. Visitors will be limited, and firearms banned.

New report says HUD undercounted homelessness in the Bay Area by 6,000

According to a new report by housing and real estate website Zillow, an estimated 25,951 people were unhoused in the Bay Area last year. That's over 6,000 more than were officially counted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development during last year's point-in-time count—the yearly homeless count that is known for undercounting the number of people who are unhoused in cities around the country.

To make their study, Zillow analysts built algorithms that took into account cities' populations, poverty rates, and rent affordability, and calculated by how much the official counts were likely to be off.

Zillow estimates that there were 8,855 homeless people living in San Francisco last year—higher than the 6,858 counted by HUD. In Alameda County, Zillow estimated there were 6,975 homeless—more than the 5,629 counted by HUD. And in Santa Clara County, Zillow estimates that there were 10,121 homeless residents—more than the 7,394 counted by the HUD census.

Homeless Activists in Washington DC Spur the Passage of an Expansive Public Restroom Bill

On December 18, lawmakers in Washington DC approved legislation that will create more public restrooms in the city. To do this, the city will launch two complementary pilot programs next year, assuming that they are funded during D.C.'s annual budget process in the spring. The bill was conceived of by the People for Fairness Coalition, a non-profit run almost exclusively by homeless and formerly homeless people.

The bill will establish a working group of city agencies and community experts that will review where additional public restrooms are needed and could be built. The 14 member group will recommend two pilot sites to the mayor for stand-alone public restrooms. The city will be responsible for maintaining these facilities, and they will be free for everyone to use.



Lillie Kate/Flickr

Enlightenment is not the solution to poverty

COMMENTARY

By Jack Bragen

WHEN basic necessities aren't present, or when one's living conditions are otherwise compromised, (such as if you live in a high crime area) this equals suffering. This is not a question of "poverty consciousness."

Successful people, at least some of them, are fond of the belief that one's economic situation is the result of how one thinks. This could be true some of the time. Certainly, a better mind is almost always an asset in the quest to live well.

Yet, there are homeless individuals who have doctorates. There are homeless people who are otherwise geniuses. The fact that many of them haven't died because of their predicament is a testament to the fact that their minds are working.

Buddhism and other ways of practicing mindfulness will not fill your bank account, your car's gas tank, or your belly. Lack of basic necessities will snap almost any meditation practitioner out of their emotionally comfortable state of attainment. If you prioritize emotional comfort above meeting basic needs, you could be in for an unpleasant surprise.

Buddhism and other ways of practicing mindfulness will not fill your bank account, your car's gas tank, or your belly.

On the other hand, if you have enough emotional control that you can deal with "survival" situations in a calm, effective manner, then you could say that your "attainment" is working for you. Panic is not usually a good place from which to navigate your life path.

However, if you are in the path of a tsunami, it doesn't matter what sect of Zen Buddhism in which you've practiced. If you are in the path of a speeding bus, it won't matter how piously you've prayed in church. Certain realities are inescapable regardless of how well your mind works.

Money is the great liberator. Those who have a lot of money have choices. Those who do not have money lack insulation from the harsh realities of the physical plane of existence. Lack of money will cause most people to live on "lower spiritual levels." Albeit, sometimes, the hardship of lack of money can cause people to take refuge in Jesus, in The Buddha, or in agnostic ponderings. If you lack choices in how you live on the physical plane, it can be a motivator to seek liberation in spirit. But affluence, not meditation, is the main force that has them liberated. The whole thing is phony.

If you meditate because you have disturbing thoughts about who you are, then you are dealing with basic insecurity in your personality. This is a much easier thing to conquer than "where am I going to live on my eight hundred dollar a month Social Security check?"

Enlightenment doesn't solve these problems. It could make you accept your problems on an emotional level. This could make it easier to solve those problems. You are still stuck needing to solve the problems. If you have an unsolvable problem, meditation won't solve it. However, it could allow you to not suffer while you have such problem.

Wealth and poverty are not the same issues as one's level of consciousness. Wealth consciousness is irrelevant if you lack the means of acquiring income. It might give you enough faith that you will spend your last five dollars at Starbucks because the universe is about to provide. What if the universe doesn't provide?

The willingness to feel uncomfortable is an asset if seeking survival or success, or if you're trying to deprogram a painful area of consciousness. So many people who pursue meditation and/or mindfulness are probably doing this because they hurt on the inside. Those who subvert their pain, or who use its energy to be motivated, tend to be successful in business. However, this can produce driven, mean and nasty businesspersons. Or, even if a person maintains her or his niceness, you are still at risk for obsessive behavior, and at risk of psychologically caused illness. The commonly accepted businessperson does just that. They push through their pain, they subvert it, or they use its power. Very few individuals fix their emotional problems before pursuing their ambitions. It is only when they get older, and possibly realize that nothing is working to ease the pain that is gnawing at their insides, that they might seek spiritual attainment.

Most people can take actions necessary to live, or to become monetarily attained. It is to an extent irrelevant what the internal picture looks like.

However, if you have a disability, if you have bad luck, or if you are otherwise unsuited to earning money, then you should not attribute lack of money as a sign of mental weakness. And let's not forget that many people, whether they are minorities and subject to discrimination, if they lack socioeconomic status, or a thousand other possible reasons, are poor; and it has nothing to do with who they are spiritually or mentally.

Jack Bragen is a writer who lives in the Bay Area. His most recent book, "An Offering of Power: Valuable, Unusual Meditation Methods," is currently available for purchase at LULU.com.